

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 4, 2006

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

Over one month ago, we wrote to you about the war in Iraq. In the face of escalating violence, increasing instability in the region, and an overall strain on our troops that has reduced their readiness to levels not seen since Vietnam, we called upon you to change course and adopt a new strategy to give our troops and the Iraqi people the best chance for success.

Although you have not responded to our letter, we surmise from your recent press conferences and speeches that you remain committed to maintaining an open-ended presence of U.S. forces in Iraq for years to come. That was the message the American people received on August 21, 2006, when you said, "we're not leaving [Iraq], so long as I'm the President."

Unfortunately, your stay the course strategy is not working. In the five-week period since writing to you, over 60 U.S. soldiers and Marines have been killed, hundreds of U.S. troops have been wounded, many of them grievously, nearly 1,000 Iraqi civilians have died, and the cost to the American taxpayer has grown by another \$8 billion dollars. Even the administration's most recent report to Congress on Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq indicates that security trends in Iraq are deteriorating, and likely to continue to worsen for the foreseeable future. With daily attacks against American and Iraqi troops at close to their highest levels since the start of the war, and sectarian violence intensifying, we can only conclude that our troops are caught in the middle of a low-grade civil war that is getting worse.

Meanwhile, the costs of a failed Iraq policy to our military and our security have been staggering. As you know, not a single Army non-deployed combat brigade is currently prepared to meet its wartime mission, and the Marine Corps faces equally urgent equipment and personnel shortages. Lieutenant General Blum, the National Guard Bureau Chief, has stated that the National Guard is "even further behind or in an even more dire situation than the active Army." Your recent decision to involuntarily recall thousands of Marines to active duty to serve in Iraq is but the latest confirmation of the strain this war has placed on our troops. At the same time, the focus on Iraq and the toll it has taken on our troops and on our diplomatic capabilities has diverted our attention from other national security challenges and greatly constrained our ability to deal with them.

In short, Mr. President, this current path – for our military, for the Iraqi people, and for our security – is neither working, nor making us more secure.

Therefore, we urge you once again to consider changes to your Iraq policy. We propose a new direction, which would include: (1) transitioning the U.S. mission in Iraq to counter-terrorism, training, logistics and force protection; (2) beginning the phased redeployment of U.S. forces from Iraq before the end of this year; (3) working with Iraqi leaders to disarm the militias and to develop a broad-based and sustainable political settlement, including amending the Constitution to achieve a fair sharing of power and resources; and (4) convening an international conference and contact group to support a political settlement in Iraq, to preserve Iraq's sovereignty, and to revitalize the stalled economic reconstruction and rebuilding effort. These proposals were outlined in our July 30th letter and are consistent with the "U.S. Policy in Iraq Act" you signed into law last year.

We also think there is one additional measure you can take immediately to demonstrate that you recognize the problems your policies have created in Iraq and elsewhere – consider changing the civilian leadership at the Defense Department. From the failure to deploy sufficient numbers of troops at the start of the war or to adequately equip them, to the prison abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib, to disbanding the Iraqi military, to the failure to plan for the post-war occupation, the Administration's mistakes have taken a toll on our troops and our security. It is unacceptable to dismiss the concerns of military personnel and their families when they are affected by the consequences of these failures, as the Secretary of Defense recently did in Alaska by suggesting that volunteers should not complain about having their deployments extended. While a change in your Iraq policy will best advance our chances for success, we do not believe the current civilian leadership at the Department of Defense is suited to implement and oversee such a change in policy.

Mr. President, staying the course in Iraq has not worked and continues to divert resources and attention from the war on terrorism that should be the nation's top security priority. We hope you will consider the recommendations for change that we have put forward. We want to work with you in finding a way forward that honors the enormous sacrifice of our troops and promotes U.S. national security interests in the region. We believe our plan will achieve those goals.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Harry Reid

Rich Durbin

Joe Biden

Al Franken

Carl Levin

Jay Byrnes

Nancy Pelosi

Stacy

J.P. Durbin

Tom Lantos

Max Baucus

Jon Kyl